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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Security Council
Sixty-ninth year

Identical letters dated 26 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I wish to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the seventh report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014) (S/2014/696):

1. The approach adopted in the seventh report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014) continues to ignore the realities of and the developments in the situation in Syria. The report continues to describe armed terrorist groups as "armed groups" or the "armed opposition", although the international community has affirmed that these groups are terrorist entities. Indeed, the Security Council recently adopted resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) to counter the threat posed by these entities. The report's authors also continue to distort the facts and politicize humanitarian issues, and refuse to acknowledge the vast progress the Syrian Government and United Nations humanitarian agencies have made in meeting the humanitarian needs of Syrian civilians. The report also strayed significantly from the mandate established for the Secretary-General. It addresses issues that are far removed from the humanitarian situation, such as the situation that was facing the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the question of the use of chlorine. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic finds it deplorable that the report fails to mention the humanitarian catastrophe that occurred on Tuesday, 16 September 2014 in the countryside of Idlib governorate, when fictitious health institutions affiliated with armed terrorist groups conspired, with the cooperation of the Turkish authorities, to kill 15 innocent Syrian children by

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administering expired vaccines to them. Dozens of other innocent children suffered from asphyxiation as a result of this crime.

2. Since 2011, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in keeping with its constitutional and humanitarian responsibilities, has marshalled all its resources to meet the essential needs of those citizens who have been affected by the crimes committed by armed terrorist groups. It has done so despite the tremendous price the Syrian State has paid as a result of the acts of terrorism that have been systematically directed against its institutions and infrastructure. In that regard, it reaffirms its readiness to continue to cooperate with the United Nations to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all affected Syrian citizens, without discrimination. It also abides by the letter and spirit of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), in accordance with the sequence of steps specified in Security Council resolution 2165 (2014) and the understanding reached in the Security Council in that regard, and on the basis of respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law, the guiding principles for humanitarian emergency assistance annexed to General Assembly resolution 46/182 and, above all, the principle of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria that was reaffirmed in Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014).

3. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that, in order to resolve the humanitarian crisis that has developed in many parts of Syria, it is essential to address the roots of the problem and the factors that are exacerbating it. In particular, this means countering and eradicating terrorism that is being backed by Arab States, as well as States of the region and beyond. Indeed, in its resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), the Council acknowledged this link and stressed the importance of countering and eradicating terrorism. In that connection, it is regrettable that, in its reports, the Secretariat continues to ignore the fact that armed terrorist groups are primarily responsible for the ever-worsening humanitarian crisis in Syria. It insists on addressing the humanitarian situation in Syria in a manner that is selective, biased, politicized and contrary to the facts on the ground, and that disregards the guiding principles of United Nations humanitarian assistance. The report's authors also insist on using the designation "the armed opposition" for terrorist groups that have been classified by the Security Council as being terrorist entities associated with Al-Qaida. These groups include the Nusrah Front and its allies, as well as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its allies. The authors furthermore insist that they are incapable of verifying whether "foreign fighters" are present in Syria. Such a position contradicts the report itself, which confirms that thousands of foreign fighters are present, and the relevant Security Council resolutions, the most recent of which are resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014).

4. The authors' insistence that "ISIL is a consequence, not a cause, of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic" is contrary to the facts on the ground and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014). This position also ignores the fact that the terrorist group ISIL came into being as a result of the American and Western invasion of Iraq and that it spread from there to Syria and other countries. We are therefore surprised by the manner in which the report addresses the question of ISIL, because Syria has stressed, since the events in the country began, that ISIL was a terrorist organization. It had also stressed that ISIL and the Nusrah Front, along with their ally Al-Qaida, were present in the country from the outset, and that they were the cause, not a consequence, of

the Syrian crisis. The decision of the Secretariat and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to deliberately ignore the terrorism that is being directed against Syria with the support of Arab States, as well as States of the region and beyond, and their continued lack of attention to the crimes committed by armed terrorist groups undermines the credibility of these reports and those responsible for them. It also impedes, both directly and indirectly, the vital role that the United Nations is expected to play, in complete impartiality and without regard for political considerations, in countering and eradicating terrorism and holding accountable those who support, fund and arm terrorists.

5. The Syrian Government believes that the Organization's policies must be in line with its Charter, international law, the conditions governing humanitarian work, General Assembly resolution 46/182 and Security Council resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014), both of which affirmed the priority of combating terrorism and terrorist organizations, including ISIL, the Nusrah Front and associated groups. The Government notes that in order for certain States to demonstrate they sincerely wish to counter terrorism, they must desist from providing funding, arms and training to terrorist organizations and from smuggling terrorists into the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian work must be conducted under the auspices of the United Nations and should not exclude any party. Such work must not be conducted under the aegis of States that have funded and armed terrorists and smuggled them into Syria, including terrorists affiliated with ISIL, the Nusrah Front and other terrorist groups. These terrorists come from 83 different States, a fact that was acknowledged by the Heads of those States of which the terrorists are nationals in the statements they made at a meeting of the Security Council held at the summit level on 24 September 2014. Syria has declared its readiness to cooperate at the international and regional level in countering terrorism through an international or regional alliance that would be established under the auspices of the United Nations. It is also prepared to engage in bilateral cooperation to that end and supports any international effort aimed at countering terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, provided that, in doing so, every effort is made to safeguard civilian lives, respect national sovereignty and adhere to international instruments.

6. The Syrian Government has repeatedly stated that medical relief supplies brought into Syria should conform to the standards of the Ministry of Health of the Syrian Arab Republic and the World Health Organization. In order to safeguard the lives of civilians, Syria has also stressed that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent must be the primary partner in the distribution of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, directly to beneficiaries throughout the country, including difficult-to-reach areas and hotspots. Lack of cooperation and coordination in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, and the exclusion of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent from the distribution process gave rise to a crime, indeed, a humanitarian catastrophe on Tuesday, 16 September 2014. This catastrophe came about through the connivance of fictitious health institutions affiliated with armed terrorist groups and the Turkish Government, and resulted in the death of 15 innocent Syrian children. They died after they were given expired, poisoned measles vaccine that was obtained from unknown sources. The incidents occurred in an area to the east of Ma'arrat Nu'man in the countryside of Idlib governorate, which is located in the northern part of the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, dozens of innocent children suffered from asphyxiation as a result of this crime against humanity. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic finds it deplorable

that the report fails to mention this humanitarian catastrophe, although it occurred in the reporting period.

7. The Government reiterates that the success of humanitarian work depends on cooperation and transparency on the part of the United Nations. The Organization should also desist from criticizing the Government's actions without cause and reject conduct on the part of certain United Nations officials that encroaches on Syria's sovereignty and undermines the Syrian State. The Government furthermore warns that the acute funding shortfall in the humanitarian response plan is one of the greatest challenges and obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected persons in Syria. As of September, only 31 per cent of the funding required for the humanitarian response plan had been secured. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has provided us with a document that indicates that it has received only $63 million, or 23 per cent, of its $270 million assistance budget to date.

8. The Syrian Government deeply regrets that the United Nations, represented by the World Food Programme (WFP), intends to reduce the size of the food parcel it provides by 40 per cent, that is to say, by nearly half, although it will continue to deliver assistance at the current high rate. This means that the contents of the new food basket will not be sufficient to meet the needs of a beneficiary family for more than 15 days. In addition, basic items were removed from the parcel to save costs, but at the expense of being able to meet the essential needs of beneficiary families. While the Government appreciates the efforts made by WFP to deal with this reduction, which was brought about by an acute funding shortfall caused by efforts to politicize and undermine humanitarian work, it calls on the United Nations to be forthright and draw attention to this challenge and to stop blaming the Government without cause. The Government is also gravely concerned at information it has received that certain donor States, in line with their political agendas, intend to break up humanitarian work and direct funding to cross-border assistance. Should such an action be taken, it would constitute an inhumane act of discrimination that is contrary to the guiding principles that govern humanitarian work. It would also establish a precedent with disastrous consequences for the humanitarian work the United Nations performs around the world, and adversely affect those civilians suffering as a result of the crisis in Syria.

9. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is dismayed that, for political motives, senior United Nations officials have cited arbitrary estimates and inaccurate and undocumented figures on humanitarian needs in Syria in their statements and reports. Such conduct adversely affects the credibility and precision of information related to humanitarian work. This is the case with many of the reports on the Syrian crisis issued by the United Nations, including the report being discussed. This report cites information taken from unsubstantiated testimony and reports issued by anti-Syrian parties, including in particular the reports of the international commission of inquiry for Syria and Human Rights Watch, which are characterized by politicization and lack of objectivity. The Government has previously informed the Resident Coordinator for United Nations activities in Syria that it deplores such irresponsible conduct.

10. During August 2014, the distribution of food aid was extended to a total of 4,160,000 beneficiaries throughout Syria. That outcome was made possible not by the small number of trucks that have crossed the border, but rather by the close

cooperation and coordination between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and WFP, not to mention the Government's significant action to facilitate the delivery of aid from within Syrian territory. By cooperating with the Syrian Government, the United Nations has been better able to access numerous areas that have been variously described as besieged or hard to reach. This shows yet again that the centre of gravity for aid distribution remains Damascus.

11. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is surprised that the United Nations side has delivered humanitarian assistance across borders to areas that had previously been reached from within Syrian territory, and has done so at very close intervals. The United Nations must coordinate aid delivery with the Syrian Government, including aid delivered across borders in areas where it has had limited reach. Doing so is important in order to ensure that aid is not delivered twice to the same beneficiaries, and to avoid wasting time, efforts and funds. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic therefore stresses that the Resident Coordinator must supervise all relief operations, including those involving the importation of assistance across the borders, in coordination with the Syrian Government. Such a course of action would ensure the implementation of the letter and spirit of Security Council resolution 2165 (2014), the application of the fundamental principles governing the work of the United Nations in crises and respect for the sovereignty of Syria, as reaffirmed by the resolutions of the Security Council. It would also ensure that aid distribution is not subject to Western agendas that benefit those States, rather than the Syrian people.

12. The Syrian Government has continued, whenever possible, to facilitate the efforts of the United Nations to access many hard-to-reach areas in Rif Dimashq, the eastern and western parts of the Aleppo countryside, Idlib and the countrysides of Dar'a, Homs and Hama. In addition, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered humanitarian assistance to those areas in the period from 23 August to 22 September 2014.

- In cooperation with the Syrian Government and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delivered humanitarian assistance from within Syrian territory to over one million beneficiaries in July and August 2014, as detailed in the report compiled by ICRC. It was also able to deliver medical assistance to hotspots in Aleppo and its countryside and in Rif Dimashq.

- An emergency response was organized in order to address the displacement of families from Qunaytirah governorate to the Qatna district of Rif Dimashq owing to terrorist attacks. Some 4,925 families were displaced during the period from 7 to 17 September 2014. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent sent medical teams and mobile clinics, treating 718 ill persons and providing 1,000 food parcels in addition to non-food supplies and health-care supplies on 7 September 2014.

- On 22 September 2014, humanitarian assistance convoys were deployed to Hulah (Kafr Laha) and Ghawr in the countryside of Homs governorate. Some 700 food parcels were distributed in Hulah district and 2,500 in Ghawr district, in addition to children's food.

- On 12 September 2014, humanitarian assistance was delivered to Dar'a governorate; 1,300 food parcels and the same number of health-care parcels

were distributed in Tafas, and 800 food parcels and the same number of health-care parcels in Shajarah.

- From 2 to 8 September 2014, some 2,000 food parcels were distributed in Idlib governorate and 825 in Hama governorate.
- An agreement has been reached to incorporate hotspots into monthly humanitarian assistance distribution plans for Idlib and Hama governorates. Action has been taken to facilitate the access of aid convoys to the two governorates. The affected districts include Qah, Badama, Saraqib, Jisr al-Shughur, Armanaz, Sarmin, Ariha and Darkush in the Idlib countryside, and Aqrab, Tallaf, Dayr al-Faradis, Qal'at al-Madiq, Ba'rin, Humayri, Khirbat Jami', Rawdah, Tama'inah, the area to the east of Hama, and Muhradah in the Hama countryside.
- On 10 September 2014, medical assistance was delivered to medical centres in the towns of Tafas, Jasim, Nawa, Harak, Basr al-Harir, Nahitah, Mulayhah, Nimr and Harah in Dar'a governorate.
- On 5 September 2014, some 1,000 food parcels were delivered to families in Yabrud, Rif Dimashq governorate.
- On 9 September 2014, medical supplies, including medicine for chronic diseases, child vaccinations and milk for children, were delivered to the town of Duma, in Rif Dimashq governorate.
- On 27 August 2014, the towns of Yabrud and Busra al-Sham received 2,000 and 1,000 food parcels respectively.
- The Syrian Government has agreed to the Resident Coordinator's request for an assistance convoy to Hirista, in Rif Dimashq. The details are to be agreed upon soon by the relevant joint committee.
- On 23 September 2014, the Syrian Government announced that it had approved the request submitted by the United Nations on 21 September for relief supplies to be brought in through the Nusaybin crossing from 29 September.
- The Syrian Government regrets that, for the third time, the United Nations failed to deliver assistance to Adra al-Ummaliyah and Adra al-Balad, whereas the national authorities responsible for relief have recently been able to reach the latter.
- Until 19 September 2014, despite ongoing attacks, assistance continued to be delivered to Yarmouk camp, which is besieged from within by armed terrorist groups. Some 8,028 food parcels and 874 health-care parcels were distributed, bringing the totals since the beginning of the year to 50,166 food parcels and 6,949 health-care parcels. Some 21 ill persons were transported out of the camp and taken to hospitals in Damascus, bringing the total number of ill persons evacuated from the camp since the beginning of the year to 4,485. The medical facility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continued to treat patients at the distribution site and provide them with medication. A Palestinian civil society organization has continued to vaccinate children at the distribution point. What the report fails to mention is that the terrorist groups have prevented humanitarian teams from accessing distribution points and have opened fire on civilians and relief teams.

- The Government has agreed to instruct officials at the border crossings of Nasib, Jadidah, Yabus and Nusaybin and the ports of Ladhiqiyah and Tartus to facilitate procedures to deliver humanitarian assistance in the context of the procedures currently in force. The decision was taken in response to a request from the United Nations. The Syrian Government will continue to cooperate with the United Nations to address any problems in the procedures regulating the movement of relief convoys as long as international agencies continue to abide by the fundamental principles governing humanitarian work, the most important of which is respect for national sovereignty, in order to facilitate the movement of relief supplies and ensure that they reach their destination and beneficiaries as soon as possible.

- The Syrian Government has given approval to the Swiss non-governmental relief organization Medair and continues to examine other applications.

- The United Nations delivered humanitarian assistance to Mu'addamiyah in July 2014. What the Organization witnessed inside the city confirms that it is not under siege, and that the 4,000 civilians who remained in the Darayya area have been able to reach Mu'addamiyah, contrary to the claims made in the Secretariat's reports concerning the two areas, including the report under consideration. The latter does not refer to facts on the ground, something that raises questions regarding its credibility.

13. With regard to the matter of visas, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to note that, in the reporting period, it granted the requested entry visas for international officials. The Government hopes that this matter will be settled through cooperation between Syria and the relevant United Nations organizations.

14. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is surprised that the report yet again fails to apportion blame clearly and explicitly to the armed terrorist groups. Throughout the crisis, the groups have made it their practice to deliberately and systematically sabotage and destroy the infrastructure, services and public and private property, including hospitals, schools, homes and Islamic and Christian places of worship. Their objective is to harm Syrian civilians and their State, to hurt the economy and to bankrupt the Syrian State.

15. The Syrian Government notes that it has informed the United Nations side of the situation of a number of local staff members who had been imprisoned on charges of terrorism. Those individuals have been handed over to the competent judicial authorities. The Government is therefore surprised that the United Nations refers to them as detainees.

16. The Syrian Government reiterates its keen concern for the security and safety of aid workers affiliated with the United Nations and its agencies. The Syrian Government stresses that it must be informed sufficiently in advance of the importation of humanitarian assistance into its territory so that it may take the necessary measures to ensure the delivery of such assistance and also to ensure the security and safety of humanitarian agency personnel. The monitoring mechanism established pursuant to resolution 2165 (2014) must ensure that cross-border humanitarian assistance is distributed to the affected Syrian civilians who need it, and that it does not fall into the hands of the terrorists. It is not enough to state that

the goods were searched when they were loaded hundreds of kilometres from the distribution zones.

17. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is surprised that the report once again ignores the negative effects that unilateral coercive measures have had on the lives of the Syrian people. In order to tackle the humanitarian crisis in Syria, terrorism must be fought and the unilateral economic and financial sanctions that have affected the lives of Syrian citizens must be lifted. Some of the States that claim concern for the fundamental principles of human rights are the very same ones that imposed the illegal sanctions. The Syrian Government notes that the most recent report of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the world economic situation states that unilateral economic sanctions imposed by the United States of America and its allies have harmed the living conditions of Syrian civilians and their ability to meet their own basic needs.

18. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic rejects the claims made in the Secretary-General's report that the Syrian armed forces are indiscriminately targeting civilians. The Syrian Arab Army has fulfilled its constitutional role and moral duty by protecting its citizens from armed terrorist groups and preventing them from committing crimes against Syrians in their homes, schools, universities, hospitals, mosques, churches and places of work. Those crimes have also affected foreign journalists, UNDOF peacekeepers and humanitarian assistance convoys. At the same time, the Syrian Government is earnestly striving to reach a political solution and bring about national reconciliation. This is Syria's national strategy.

19. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is surprised at the position of the report regarding what it refers to as ceasefire agreements. National reconciliation agreements have restored peace, security and stability to numerous parts of Syria, sparing the lives of thousands of innocent Syrian civilians. The report's sceptical position is therefore deplorable. By insisting that the agreements should not be supported, the report gives the impression that the United Nations wants the crisis to continue and spread uncontrollably across the country, something that would endanger international peace and security.

20. At the Geneva conference, the Syrian Government emphasized the importance of prioritizing counter-terrorism and achieving national reconciliation in order to arrive at a political solution under Syrian leadership. In order to do so, it is essential to recognize the aspirations of the Syrian people as expressed with particular clarity in the multi-candidate presidential elections held within and beyond Syria in June and July 2014. The elections were monitored by parliamentarians from around the world and by media outlets from over 40 countries.

21. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic repeats that it supports any international effort to combat terrorism in all its forms, manifestations and names. In accordance with international conventions, such efforts must protect the lives of civilians and respect national sovereignty and unity. The Security Council must help Syria restore security by calling on the international community to stop interfering in internal Syrian affairs and focus on countering and suppressing terrorism, incitement thereto and the financing thereof. Security Council resolutions 2133 (2014), 2170 (2014) and 2128 (2014) confirm the soundness of Syria's call for serious efforts to root out terrorism and halt the funding, arming, training, sheltering and smuggling of terrorists.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 69 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar Ja'afari
Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic
to the United Nations